

Okomfo Anokye

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Okomfo Anokye (active late 17th century), properly written in Akan as Okomfoɔ Anokye, was an Akuapim priest, statesman and lawgiver. He occupies a Merlin-like position in Ashanti history. A co-founder of the Empire of Asante in West Africa, he helped establish its constitution, laws, and customs.

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Early life

Okomfo Anokye was born in the late 1600 in Awukugua-Akuapim, in the Eastern Region of Ghana. His father, Ano, was from the Awukugua-Akuapim part of the Ayade Tribe and mother, Yaa Anubea, was from the Asante Agona part of the Ashanti(Asante Tribe). At the time of his birth, his two palms were firmly held together and could not be separated. Curious to know what he was holding in his hands, his parents tried to separate his palms to no avail - about two years into his childhood. Inside his palm were totem poles believed to be from the gods. His parents and family believe he was sent by the gods to lead the Okere people. Later in life, he attained priesthood and was given the title "Okomfo". His full name became Okomfo Anokye. His ancestral home (the house he was born in) is opposite the Awukugua Chief Palace. A shrine is also located at Awukugua and is a frequent site of meeting for the Ohum festival in October. The shrine consists of a palm tree, which he climbed wearing his sandals, and a large rock, from which he carved a game of Oware. Other shrine sites are located in Awukugua-Akuapim.

The Denkyeras later heard of his wonders and requested his aid. Through Anokye's help, the Denkyeras successfully defeated the Ashantis. Osei Tutu,the king of the Ashanti at the time, also requested Anokye's aid. Anokye went to Osei Tutu's aid in Kumasi, capital of the Ashanti Empire, with a group of his tribesmen and women. King Osei Tutu gave Anokye land to settle on after he helped them to defeat the Denkyera. This land was named Nzemaa. According to oral tradition, after the Ashanti defeated the Denkyera, the Golden Stool descended from heaven to land on Osei Tutu's lap. He gave it to the Ashantis. He also put a sword in the ground as a symbol of unity between the Nzema and the Ashanti. The oath also prevented the Ashanti from fighting the Nzema and allows Ashantis and Nzemas to marry each other with one single plantain as dowry.

The founding of Ashanti

When Osei Tutu succeeded in about 1690 to the leadership of the small group of Akan forest states around the city of Kumasi, which were already grouped in a loose military alliance, Anokye was his adviser and chief priest. Tutu and Anokye, who must be considered together, carried out the expansionist policy of their predecessors, defeating two powerful enemies, the Akan Doma to the northwest and the Denkyera empire to the south.

It was and still is said by the historians of Ashanti that the Asante people are descendants of the great Ghana Empire (thus the current name that Kwame Nkrumah gave the country), which is said to supplant their martial valour. The Ashanti conquered large parts of Ghana during the 17th century by overthrowing their powerful overlords, the Denkyera. Okomfo Anokye was essentially a powerful cleric who served to rally the people to the cause of his king. Anokye is also said to have placed a dagger in the middle of the Ashanti region, which the Europeans have not been able to take out with any type of technology for over 500 years. Ashanti was one of the few regions in West Africa to achieve victories against the British in battle.

The unification of the Ashanti peoples

To throw off the Denkyera yoke required a powerful unity that transcended the particularism of the Ashanti segments, and Anokye employed not only the political influence of his priesthood but also the spiritual ties it engendered to transform the loose Ashanti alliance into a "national" union in 1695.

Anokye and Tutu established rituals and customs of the Ashanti state to diminish the influence of local traditions. They designated Kumasi, the Ashanti capital. They then established a state council of the chiefs of the preexisting states admitted to the union and suppressed all competing traditions of origin. Finally, they reorganized the Ashanti army.

The war with the Denkyera

The war with Denkyera (1699-1701) went badly at first, but when the Denkyera army reached the gates of Kumasi, Anokye's incantations supposedly produced defections among their generals. The Ashanti broke the Denkyera hegemony and captured the Dutch deed of rent for Elmina Castle. This gave the traders of the empire access to the African coast and involved them henceforth in the commerce and politics of the coastal slave trade. After Osei Tutu's death in 1717, Anokye is said to have returned to Akwapim and died there. The real cause of his death is not known and it is said that he was going to bring the key to death - and so no one should cry; if anyone is heard crying he will never return. After a couple of days he still was not back and so the women cried, and it was said that he did not return again.

External links

- "The Great Prophet Okomfo Anokye" (<http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/artikel.php?ID=93275>), GhanaWeb, 31 October 2005.
- http://www.info-ghana.com/ashanti_empire.htm
- <http://acona-usacanada.org/asantehistory1.html>

- <http://www.doth.com/kwanzaa/africa/ghana/ghana.htm>
- <http://www.cosw.sc.edu/photogallery/ghana2001/pages/Okomfo%20Anokye%2023.htm>
- "Osei Tutu (d. 1717)" (<http://www.blackhistorypages.net/pages/oseitutu.php>). Black History Pages.

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| [17th-century African people](#)

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